



## PREVENTION OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE BIG SKY

### Preventing Foodborne Illness: Modernizing Montana's Food Rules

The average U.S. household spends approximately 40% of their food budget dining out, yet few likely consider the potential health risks. A 2008 survey of 491 U.S. restaurant workers demonstrated about 60% recalled working a shift while ill, and 16% recalled working while suffering nausea, upset stomach, or 'stomach flu'. A food service worker with a gastrointestinal illness could potentially transmit infectious organisms to consumers. Each year in the United States, an estimated 48 million cases of foodborne illnesses occur, resulting in 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. In Montana, 9 foodborne illness outbreaks that resulted in 114 cases of illness and 2 hospitalizations were reported during 2013–2014. An ill food service worker(s) was implicated in 4 (80%) of the 5 restaurant-associated outbreaks (**Table 1**). The number of foodborne illnesses and outbreaks in Montana are likely higher than reported here as foodborne illnesses often go unrecognized and unreported.

To decrease the risk of foodborne illnesses, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) developed the 2013 Food Code. The FDA's 2013 Food Code addresses the risk of ill food service workers transmitting illness to other workers or consumers. On January 1, 2015, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) adopted this code, which revised the Administrative Rules of Montana for retail food establishments (e.g., restaurants, grocers, schools, assisted living facilities, etc.). Substantial changes were made regarding the health of food service workers in retail food settings. Another key change was the new requirement that food service workers are now restricted from bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food unless approved by the local health department.

In this issue of *Montana Public Health*, we review key sections of the 2013 Food Code that pertain to food service worker health and risk of transmitting disease to other workers or consumers.

#### Food Service Worker Exclusions and Restrictions

Healthcare providers should ask any patient with acute gastroenteritis if they work in a sensitive occupation, including food service. A food service worker suffering symptoms consistent with acute gastroenteritis (e.g., vomiting, diarrhea) is required to report the symptoms to their employer. To protect the public's health, the food service management must exclude the ill food service worker; the ill worker is only allowed to return to work after certain criteria are met (**Table 2**).

Because certain organisms are of substantial public health risk and can result in disease transmission following the resolution of symptoms, a food service worker is required to report gastrointestinal illnesses caused by the following bacteria and viruses to their employer: *Salmonella typhi*, non-typhoidal *Salmonella* spp., *Shigella* spp., hepatitis A virus, and norovirus. For each condition, specific criteria must be met before the food service worker may return to work (**Table 3**).

Food service workers can suffer acute or chronic vomiting and diarrhea caused by non-infectious conditions or medications. In these instances, the food service worker is required to provide documentation the condition is non-infectious. An employer can request the employee provide documentation from a healthcare provider.

The complete text of the 2013 Food Code can be found here: <http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/ucm374275.htm>

**Table 1.** Selected characteristics of reported foodborne illness outbreaks, Montana, 2013–2014

	2013	2014	Total
No. reported outbreaks	5	4	9
No. reported illnesses	63	50	113
No. reported hospitalizations	1	1	2
No. reported deaths	0	0	0
No. outbreaks associated with restaurant	2	3	5
No. outbreaks associated with ill worker(s)	1	3	4

**Table 2.** Criteria for food service worker exclusion and return to work by presence of symptoms

Exclusion criteria*	Return criteria
Vomiting <sup>†,§</sup>	1) Asymptomatic ≥24 hours, OR
Diarrhea <sup>†,§</sup>	1) Asymptomatic ≥24 hours, OR 2) Medical documentation
Jaundice	1) Approval from local health department, AND 2) >7 days since onset of jaundice, OR 3) Medical documentation

\*Table adapted from 2013 Food Code

<sup>†</sup>Approval from local health department for return to work not necessary

<sup>§</sup>Exceptions include when associated with certain diagnoses (e.g., norovirus, typhoid)

**Table 3.** Food service worker exclusion and criteria for returning to work without restrictions by pathogen diagnosis

Pathogen Diagnosis *	Exclusion	Criteria for Returning to Work Without Restrictions
Shiga toxin-producing <i>Escherichia coli</i>	Exclude based on vomiting or diarrhea symptoms	1) Approval obtained from local health department, AND 2) Medically cleared, OR 3) >7 days since symptoms cleared
Nontyphoidal <i>Salmonella</i> spp.	Exclude based on vomiting or diarrhea symptoms	1) Approval obtained from local health department, AND 2) Medical documentation stating free from nontyphoidal <i>Salmonella</i> , OR 3) >30 days since vomiting or diarrhea resolved
<i>Salmonella</i> Typhi	Exclude upon diagnosis	1) Approval obtained from local health department, AND 2) Medical documentation stating free from <i>S. Typhi</i> .
<i>Shigella</i> spp.	Exclude based on vomiting or diarrhea symptoms	1) Approval obtained from local health department, AND 2) Medically cleared, OR 3) >7 days since symptoms cleared
Hepatitis A virus	Exclude if ≤14 days since any symptom or ≤7 days since jaundice	1) Approval obtained from local health department, AND 2) No jaundice for >7 days, OR 3) No jaundice and asymptomatic for >14 days, OR 4) Medical documentation of ability to return to work
Norovirus	Exclude based on vomiting or diarrhea symptoms	1) Approval obtained from local health department, AND 2) Medically cleared, OR 3) >48 hours since symptoms resolved

\*Table adapted from FDA's 2013 Food Code

### Recommendations to Healthcare Providers Regarding Food Service Workers and Gastrointestinal Illnesses

- Ask all patients with signs/symptoms consistent with acute gastroenteritis if they work in a sensitive occupation, including food service
- Be aware that food handlers symptomatic with diarrhea, vomiting, or jaundice, or suffering from a disease likely to be transmitted through fecal contamination of food need to be excluded from work
- Report all suspected cases of the following conditions immediately to your local health department as they can be transmitted by the fecal-oral route to others: campylobacteriosis, cryptosporidiosis, giardiasis, hepatitis A, salmonellosis, shigellosis, and typhoid fever

**For more information, contact [fcss@mt.gov](mailto:fcss@mt.gov) or call 406-444-2837 or contact your local health department**

Please see the web-version of this report at <http://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/Montana-Public-Health> for a complete list of references

1,980 copies of this public document were published at an estimated cost of \$0.663 per copy, for a total cost of \$1,312.74 which includes \$401.94 for printing and \$910.80 for distribution.



Richard Oppen, Director, DPHHS  
Todd Harwell MPH, Administrator, PHSD